



THE COEXISTENCE OF WESTERN MEDICINE AND KOREAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN KOREA

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ABSTRACT

While both Western and Korean traditional medicine are well-known in Korea, the number of medical institutions and users who receive treatments from each medicine differs a lot. This is because there is a clear difference between each of these fields of medicine. Through this study, with the methodology of an anonymous survey, the researcher was able to observe people's opinions and thoughts regarding the two different medicines. The coexistence of two medicines is still possible in Korea since their advantages and drawbacks clearly supplement each other.

KEYWORDS: Western, Korean Traditional Medicine, Treatments, Scientific, Technology, Side Effects.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 History and development of Korean Traditional Medicine and Western Medicine in Korea

Western medicine was first introduced in Korea in the 19th century. When Korea started to accept Western culture and started to exchange goods with the Western world, Western medicine was one of the 'imports' that Korea accepted. Missionaries were one of the methods that promoted Western medicine to settle in Korea. The Enlightenment Party in Korea was made up of people who especially welcomed Western medicine and its culture. One of the incidents that promoted Western medicine further was in 1882, when tubercular bacillus spread across the country. The Germ Theory that was brought to Korea helped people prevent and treat tuberculosis. With Germ Theory helping the prevention of various diseases in Korea, other treatment methods and theories that came from the Western world spread across the country rapidly. In 1910, a great number of Western missionaries caused the creation of joint missionary areas in various countryside areas, and those missionaries had a lot of effect on introducing Western medicine hospitals and clinics in Korea, and most of them were in joint missionary areas. In fact, after 1910, there was significant population growth in Korea. It proves that Western medicine has helped Korean medical techniques develop in various ways.

Korean traditional medicine has been drawn from traditional Chinese medicine. The first Chinese medical book was brought to Korea in the year 561 AD. During the period of the Three States, similar medical books that were brought from different regions of Asia were introduced in Korea, and people adopted theories and treatments from those books. Since Eastern Medicine was the only source Korean doctors could refer to, Korean Traditional Medicine had existed in Korea for a very long period.

1.2. Comparison

Western medicine focuses more on the physical body itself and symptoms that people can examine. Doctors use "a scientific, evidence-based diagnosis of health, using clinically proven treatments" (Medibank, n.d.). Eastern or Korean traditional medicine has a long history of practicing its original ways of treatment. Unlike Western medicine, Eastern or Korean traditional medicine tends to focus more on the person itself, and they try to find the cause of the sickness in the person. In addition, the practice they perform is a "practice of treating the whole person, not just the symptom." In addition, "Eastern medicine does not evaluate an illness purely based on the symptoms a person is showing, but rather on complex patterns of disharmony in the body" (Ma et al., 2020). This different principle means that each medicine directly connects with how each of them started. Western medicine is well known as Hippocrates's achievement in Greece. Since then, Greek doctors have focused on realism, pathology, and human anatomy. On the other hand, Eastern medicine, which people mostly refer to as traditional Chinese medicine, focused more on shamanism and different religious beliefs.

When comparing the actual prescriptions and treatments each medicine doctor gives out, Western and Korean traditional medicine both have significant advantages and disadvantages. People normally consider Western medicine's treatment effective since it is faster and it can cure sickness or discomfort right away. It uses various technologies, so by using laboratories such as X-rays and MRIs, doctors and patients are able to find the cause of the sickness. Also, the prescription they gave out might be strong enough to soothe the pain. However, those prescriptions might not cure the fundamental cause of the sickness, and even the "long-term effects of the medications can weigh heavily on the body in the later years of a person's life" (Vandegrift, 2017). Eastern or Korean traditional medicine mostly uses natural sources to make medicine or treatments, such as "teas, herbs, and essential oils." Those might be

healthier and less strong than what Western medicine uses, and they might be more effective on some occasions. However, the biggest disadvantage of Eastern or Korean medicine is that there is no specific proof that those medications and treatments are effective, and there is not much information about the method itself; as a result, it mostly depends on the person and can be controversial.

1.3. Modern-day

In modern-day, both forms of medicine coexist in Korea, yet the number of hospitals differs a lot. Though both medicines are well known, according to 2019 data, there are more than 34,000 medical institutions that have adopted the Western Medicine system and about 15,000 medical institutions that have adopted the Korean Traditional Medicine system. Besides this, most of the patients or users who receive treatments from Korean Traditional Medicine are mostly elderly. In the sixties, 90.6% of them experienced receiving traditional medical treatment, and in the fifties, 86.1% of them experienced receiving traditional medical treatment. With a clear trend, the percentage decreases as the age group descends. Among the twenties, the percentage is below 50%, which indicates that younger people do not often visit or receive traditional medical institutions.

2. METHOD

The study used random sampling to collect people's opinions about the two medicines and their awareness. All of the data was collected anonymously, and the participants were not marked as having a specific gender. Samples involved teens to 60s members responding to the survey, which studies people's awareness of Korean traditional medicine in Korea. This choice was made because a wide range of age groups can help reveal the difference in awareness for each medicine. The particular reason for including the sixties was to consider that most of the Korean traditional medicine users are elderly. All the participants were Koreans who have experience visiting Korean hospitals and are aware of the difference between the two medicines introduced in the survey. Questionnaires included questions about their preference (on a scale of 1 to 5) for each medicine, the effectiveness of the treatment they got from each medical institution, and their own opinion regarding each medicine's advantages and disadvantages.

3. RESULT

Preference for Western Medicine on a scale of 1 (not preferable) to 5 (very preferable) was generally high; 45.8% (11 people) responded 5, 33.3% (8 people) responded 4, 16.7% (4 people) responded 3, 4.2% (1 person) responded 2, and 0% responded 1. Most of the reasons for this preference were because of the credibility of Western medicine. Participants responded that it is more widely accepted and that Western medicine treats people based on scientific and evidence-based methods. One of the participants responded that "it is more credible compared to Korean traditional medicine." The one participant who responded with a 2 responded that Western medicine normally "takes longer to kick in and has side effects."

Preference for Korean Traditional Medicine on a scale of 1 (not preferable) to 5 (very preferable) was mostly varied; 4.2% (1

person) responded 5, 12.5% (3 people) responded 3, 41.7% (10 people) responded 3, 16.7% (4 people) responded 2, and 25% (6 people) responded 1. Since most of the participants responded with a number between 1 and 3, it might mean that people are generally pessimistic about Korean traditional medicine. Most of the reasons for these responses were also related to credibility. Participants responded that they are not sure of the prescription they are giving and that they do not think it is as effective as the prescription that Western Medicine provides. They also think that the treatments that Korean Traditional Medicine provides are not evidence-based and lack logic in their theories.

When asked whether the treatment of Western Medicine's treat was effective on a scale of 1 (not effective at all) to 5 (very effective), 37.5% (9 people) responded 5, 54.2% (13 people) responded 4, 4.2% (1 person) responded 3, 4.2% (1 person) responded 2, and 0% responded 1. Not the majority of the participants had responded with a 5, which can be interpreted as there were still some limitations or areas for improvement in the treatment that Western Medicine provides. However, still, more than 90% of the participants responded 4 or 5, which can be inferred as most of the treatments were effective. When asked whether the treatment of Korean Traditional Medicine's treat was effective on a scale of 1 (not effective at all) to 5 (very effective), only 18 participants answered that they had experience getting treatments from Korean Traditional Medicine; 11.1% (2 people) responded 5, 22.2% (4 people) responded 4, 44.4% (8 people) responded 3, 16.7% (3 people) responded 2, and 5.6% (1 person) responded 1. It can be inferred that effectiveness varies a lot and is mostly neutral. It really depends on the person who is getting treated, and the fact that only 15 people responded to this questionnaire itself proves that not many people received treatment from Korean Traditional Medicine hospitals.

When participants were asked their opinion on Western medicine and any examples of treatments that it provides, most of the participants responded that Western medicine treats the symptoms in a more scientific, systematic way and that it is evidence-based.

When participants were asked their opinion on Korean Traditional Medicine and any example of treatments that it provides, the majority of the responses included that it lacks scientific reasoning, normally takes a longer period of time, and the treatment depends on the person. Since participants responded that it lacks scientific reasoning and research, the majority of them tend to state that Korean traditional medicine is somewhat doubtful.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Western medicine, all of the participants mentioned that Western medicine is advanced, based on scientific research, and that most of the treatments and cures are effective. Disadvantages were generally about the side effects of various treatments, resistance to antibiotics, and the fact that they were expensive. One of the participants responded that Western medicine is "methodized universally, [specialized] in both medical and surgical ailments, and the prevention of deterioration of health

through diagnostic instruments” is well advanced.

On the other hand, the advantages and disadvantages of Korean traditional medicine differ a lot compared to Western medicine. Most of the advantages were that it considers patients' body type, it can strengthen patients' immunity, it is inexpensive, and it uses natural treatments, which can be healthier than chemical treatments and have fewer issues regarding resistance and side effects. Indicated disadvantages include that it is not scientific and that it is not well-known.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Significance

Considering that among the patients who regularly receive treatments from Korean Traditional Medicine are elderly (50s to 60s), the expectation for participants who are in their fifties or sixties was to prefer Korean Traditional Medicine over Western Medicine or to have a positive opinion regarding the treatments that Korean Traditional Medicine provide. However, all of the elder participants preferred Western medicine over Korean traditional medicine and had negative opinions on the Korean traditional medicine treatments. In fact, participants who had a positive opinion regarding Korean traditional medicine were teens. From this outcome, a study has shown that the preference for Korean traditional medicine certainly depends on the person. While the teens who prefer traditional medicine also gave a high score for western medicine, It indicates that they usually use traditional medicine as more of a healing treatment, not to treat and cure the actual symptoms of their disease or sickness.

It is also significant that both medicines perfectly supplement each other's disadvantages. While Western medicine's disadvantages are that its chemical treatments might have side effects and resistance, Korean traditional medicine's advantages are that it is more cost-effective and its treatments are mostly natural, such as herbs. In contrast, while Korean traditional medicine was considered doubtful since it lacked scientific evidence, one of the strongest advantages that Western medicine has is that it is evidence-based and its techniques are well-developed.

In conclusion, since each medicine performs a different purpose but can supplement each other's drawbacks, even if there are fewer users of Korean traditional medicine, the fact that Korean traditional medicine is taking a long run is still acceptable. While numerous traditional medicine doctors agonize over the medicine's flourish, with a constant effort to develop its technologies, Korean traditional medicine will certainly be sustainable.

4.2. Limitations and Improvements

Since the sample was on an extremely small scale, if the sample size were larger, the data might have been more reliable and would have been able to avoid possible errors. Also, since most of the participants were students, when they were asked about medicine, they probably would not have enough background knowledge concerning its field. Receiving responses such as the

opinion-based advantages and disadvantages of each medicine from doctors, nurses, or any health professionals might have been helpful for this study.

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